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THE CLASSICAL JOURNAL

VOLUME XVII

JANUARY, 1922

NUMBER 4

Editorial

BACK TO THE CLASSICS

The signs of the times are not wanting in indications that educational thought is swinging the other way. Among the more notable signs we quote a communication from Paul Van Dyke, Director of the American University Union, Paris, to the Editor of the *New York Times*.

"The educational authorities of France are at present engaged in a very interesting discussion in regard to a proposed reform of secondary education. M. Léon Berard, Minister of Public Instruction, has proposed to the Committee on Instruction of the *Chambre de Deputés* quite marked changes in the programs of the secondary schools of France. It is too early to enter into detail in regard to these proposed changes. Suffice it to say for the present that they contemplate what may be fairly called a practical reversal of the fundamental principle of the reform of 1902, and a return to some of the earlier fundamental principles of French secondary education, which were partly abandoned at that epoch. The reform of 1902 was intended to be a reform in the direction of a more practical education. Abandoning, to a considerable extent, the previous idea that all scholars ought to receive up to a certain age the same education, an education which should be the best fitted to train the general powers and quality of their mind, the reform of 1902 proposed an early differentiation and specialization of studies which should begin in the early years to fit students for the special careers they proposed to follow.

"Advocates of the new reform, like M. Bérard, Minister of Public Instruction, and M. Appell, support, partly by the experi-

ence of the last twenty years, their opinion that the reform of 1902 followed the wrong road. M. Bérard believes that the true mission of secondary education consists in forming 'without immediate attention to their special careers in the future, young people of trained mind, capable of adapting themselves to the varied necessities of the social organism, no matter what direction the final specialization of their education may take.' So far as can be judged without a study of the details of his plan—not yet made public—he wishes to remove from the problem of forming the best program for secondary education all preoccupation with the immediate utility as money getters of the subjects of study under consideration. He proposes that all students should follow the same program of studies up to the age of 16, and should then be allowed to choose between the continuation of the Greco-Latin humanities and the sciences.

"The position of M. Appell, Recteur of the University of Paris, appears in an interview in the Temps. He thinks that all students in the Lycées should be required to study Latin and science, history and geography, but that they should be given their choice between Greek and a modern language. Later the course should divide into two sections, one studying Latin, Greek, sciences and a modern language, the other Latin, sciences, two modern languages. He considers a reform necessary because 'our secondary instruction cannot be a school of disorder, of the nearly known, of the habit of doing the least possible.' He would provide other schools separate from the Lycées, not requiring Latin, 'where a student could obtain a certificate which opened to him the higher instruction of the university faculties of science, for we have need of chemists, electricians, &c.' But 'no one should be allowed to teach in public institutions of learning, whether secondary or superior, who has not pursued classic studies.'

"This attitude demanding a return to obligatory Latin has earned for M. Appell, from those who oppose the present reform and desire to maintain the programs of 1902, the charge—not of being reactionary—that is reserved for those who, like the Minister of Education, are in favor both of Latin and Greek—but of compromising with reaction. The reform of the reform, whether

in the guise of restoring one or both ancient languages is labeled by some of its opponents as undemocratic, and a hostile manifesto even hints that if the reform is established by the educational authorities the 'apostles of revolution will take by force this new Bastille,' by which they apparently mean that they will try to carry the question of what and how the schools shall teach into the elections.

"In connection with the discussion of this reform an interesting incident has recently arisen. The Association of Professors of Modern Languages asked the Chamber of Commerce of Lyons to join them in demanding the maintenance of the reform of 1902 by expressing the wish that in the coming reform the teaching of modern languages in the earlier school years should not suffer any diminution by a return to the teaching of the classics. The Chamber of Commerce of Lyons has just replied to this request of the Professors of Modern Languages by a report in which they explain their reasons for refusing to join in their demand. They say: 'Public opinion in France is now well established that the results of the programs of secondary instruction in vogue for twenty years are regrettable. The abandoning of Latin and Greek, the cutting up into fragments of the courses, the absence of a principal professeur who before 1902 aided in the formation of the character and the personality of young people, have brought about the result that pupils leave school knowing less French and without having learned more of the modern languages.' . . . 'In learning Latin and Greek we learn French.' 'It is an absolute error to believe that the classic humanities should be reserved for a small number of young people who are to become lawyers or scholars or experts in ancient documents. Your appeal to the opinion of the merchants and manufacturers of the Chamber of Commerce does not fit in with their experience. We recognize from the first letter written by a new employe whether he has studied Latin or not. A simple letter of commerce implies a logical order, a sort of introduction followed by the main subject, and then something vaguely equivalent to a peroration; that is to say, a miniature of what a Latin speech is. This is even more the case when the matter in hand is a report or a more extended

study of conditions.' . . . 'In our schools of commerce the leading scholars are precisely those who have studied Latin.'

"The Chamber of Commerce summed up its opinion in a paragraph in which it concludes: 'That the study of Latin and Greek is the only way really to learn the French language; that it is also the best means of giving to the mind those ideas of clarity, logic and a good method of argumentation which are useful for preparing any sort of written matter; that the study of the classic humanities constitutes the best gymnastic for the mind and is therefore useful to all students who enter secondary education; that is to say, it is just as good for young people who expect to enter commerce and industry as it is for those who look forward to what are called the liberal professions, and that, finally, the study of classic humanities is equally useful as a preparation for the study of modern languages.'"